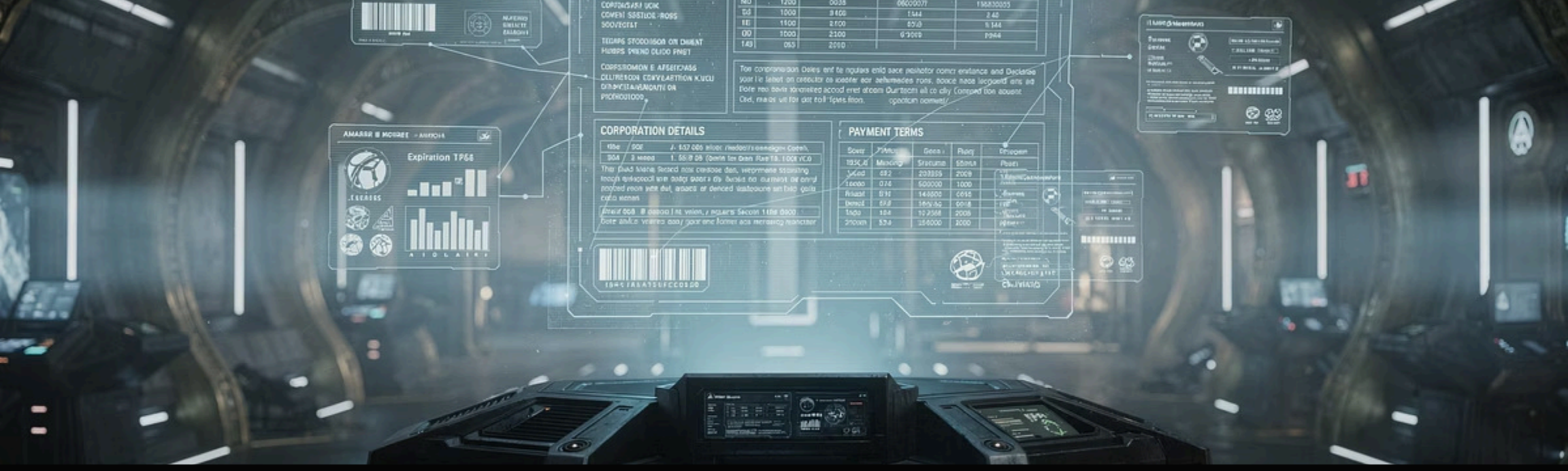
It was late. The kind of late where the station lights feel too bright and your brain feels like it's been microwaved.



I'd taken a freelance contract—simple work on paper. Mine Kernite. Deliver it across a few systems for Invision Horizon. Get paid. Build rep. Sleep.

But space doesn't care what's written on paper.

My new ship—**Bulwark (mini)**—is a Pioneer, and it feels like a promise I'm not sure I deserve yet.

She's got a bigger hold and one more Miner II than the last setup, and she moves like she actually wants to live. That extra agility matters when you're threading your way into low-sec like you're slipping a hand into a dark drain to see what's clogging it.

Home base is the **Emperor Family Academy**, safe and clean and full of people who still believe the universe is polite.

I wasn't heading to a polite place.

I plotted a jump to **Faswiba**—low-sec, **0.4**, the kind of space that smiles at you right before it pulls a knife.

Mofa region. Sansha's Nation activity in the area. "Known hostiles," like that phrase ever made anyone feel better.

The plan was straightforward:

Get in. Mine fast. Warp out. Dump the load at the nearest station in **Sarum Prime**. Head home. Collapse into my bunk like a corpse with a subscription.

The pay was **200 ISK per unit delivered**, which is technically money and spiritually an insult. I could sell for more back home.

But this wasn't about ISK.

This was about reputation.

About planting a flag in the void and saying, *I belong here*, even if my hands were shaking while I said it. The long game. The one where you build a name solid enough that people want to fly under it.

Blackbox Testament. Not just a corporation. A future.

Then I arrived in Faswiba and realized something important.

I had forgotten to load my **Hobgoblins** into the drone bay.

There are mistakes, and then there are mistakes that make you stare at your ship's systems readout like it personally betrayed you.

That's the price you pay when you're running on fumes and stubbornness.

Still, I found a belt with bigger ships chewing on **Jaspet**, industrial whales calmly grazing like the universe wasn't full of teeth.

I figured their presence might buy me time. Predators tend to circle the easy meals first.

I dropped into **Faswiba VI – Asteroid Belt 2** and got to work. Lasers biting rock. Cargo meter ticking up. That familiar mining trance where the world narrows to heat and time and the soft hope that nobody notices you.

It didn't last.

Sansha's Nation gankers showed up like a bad thought you can't shake.

Suddenly the belt didn't feel like a workplace. It felt like a room with one door, and the door was starting to close.

No combat drones. No teeth. Just me and a ship built for hauling and hope.

So I did what you do when you're outclassed and outgunned.

I ran.

Warped to another belt, heart thudding hard enough I could feel it in my teeth. I told myself the same thing I always tell myself when I'm scared and trying to sound like I'm not:

Trust the process. Trust the loop. Mine and get out safe.

That was all I could afford to think about. Anything else and the fear would start multiplying.

As much as I like working alone—and I do, some days too much—this was the point where the loneliness stopped feeling romantic and started feeling stupid.

If I'm going to make bigger runs, if I'm going to push into wormholes and null-sec like I keep telling myself I will, I'm going to need people.

Muscle. Escorts. Someone to watch my back while I watch the rocks.

Exploration ships too. Eyes in the dark.

A corp isn't a logo. It's survival, shared.

By **5:23 AM EST**, **Belt 3** was quiet.

Quiet like the moment in a horror movie right before something moves behind the curtain. But it was quiet, and quiet was all I needed.

The mining hold filled.

And when it finally did, it felt like exhaling after holding your breath underwater.

I turned for the station and didn't look back. Sometimes the only winning move is leaving before the universe remembers you exist.

By **5:33 AM**, I was on my way to drop the shipment, running on autopilot and pure spite.

My stomach reminded me I was human, so I promised it noodles if we both made it home.

And then—finally—home base again.

The Academy's lights welcomed me like nothing had happened, like I hadn't just spent the morning being hunted in the rocks.

I ate. I shut everything down. I crawled into my bunk with a full belly and a head full of stars.

Got it all finished by **6:00 AM EST**.

Lights out.

Bulwark (mini) parked and cooling, like a loyal animal pretending it wasn't scared too.

And in the last few seconds before sleep took me, one thought floated up, simple and certain:

Next time, the drone bay doesn't leave home empty.

Neither do I.